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CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

1. A method in a data processing system for handling instant messages, the method comprising:

responsive to receiving an instant message, determining whether a picture of a sender of the instant message is associated with the message, wherein the picture is located in a preexisting database of pictures; and

displaying the picture with the message on a display in the data processing system if the picture is associated with the message.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the picture and the message are displayed in a single window.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the picture is received with the message from the sender.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the picture of the sender is stored in at least one of a local cache on the data processing system and the preexisting database on a remote data processing system.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the picture is embedded by an instant messaging process of the sender into the message prior to sending the message to the data processing system.

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6.   The method of claim 1, wherein the determining step is performed by an instant messaging process of a receiver of the message and determines whether the picture is in the pre-existing database of pictures.

7.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:
        receiving the picture with the instant message.

8.   The method of claim 7, wherein the picture is received in response to a request made by a user receiving the instant message.

9.   A data processing system for handling instant messages, the data processing system comprising:
        a bus system;
        a communications unit connected to the bus system;
        a memory connected to the bus system, wherein the memory includes a set of instructions; and
        a processing unit connected to the bus system, wherein the processing unit executes the set of instructions to determine whether a picture of a sender of the instant message is associated with the message in response to receiving an instant message, wherein the picture is located in a preexisting database of pictures, and display the picture with the message on a display in the data processing system if the picture is associated with the message.

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10. A data processing system for handling instant messages, the data processing system comprising:

determining means, responsive to receiving an instant message, for determining whether a picture of a sender of the instant message is associated with the message, wherein the picture is located in a preexisting database of pictures; and

displaying means for displaying the picture with the message on a display in the data processing system if the picture is associated with the message.

11. The data processing system of claim 10, wherein the picture and the message are displayed in a single window.

12. The data processing system of claim 10, wherein the picture is received with the message from the sender.

13. The data processing system of claim 10, wherein the picture of the sender is stored in a local cache on the data processing system.

14. The data processing system of claim 10, wherein the receiving means and the displaying means are located in an instant messaging application on the data processing system.

15. The data processing system of claim 10, wherein the preexisting database of pictures is stored externally to the data processing system.

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16. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for handling instant messages in a data processing system, the computer program product comprising:

first instructions, responsive to receiving an instant message, for determining whether a picture of a sender of the instant message is associated with the message, wherein the picture is located in a preexisting database of pictures; and

second instructions for displaying the picture with the message on a display in the data processing system if the picture is associated with the message.

17. The computer program product of claim 16, wherein the picture and the message are displayed in a single window.

17. The computer program product of claim 16, wherein the picture is received with the message from the sender.

19. The computer program product of claim 16, wherein the picture of the sender is stored in a local cache on the data processing system.

20. The computer program product of claim 16, wherein preexisting database of pictures is external to the data processing system.

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21. The computer program product of claim 16 further comprising:

third instructions for receiving the picture with the instant message.

22. The computer program product of claim 16, wherein the preexisting database also is used for a different purpose.